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THE COMMUNIST NATURE
OF THE
"PATHET LAO" MOVEMENT

Introduction

One of the problems left for future resolution by the Geneva Conference Powers in July 1954 was the question of the Communist-controlled "Pathet Lao" movement which was granted temporary regroupment areas in two of Laos' northern provinces, Phong Saly and Sam Neua, pending a general political settlement to be effected through nationwide elections scheduled to be held some time during 1955. Like its Vietnamese progenitor, the Viet Minh, the "Pathet Lao" movement has consistently asserted itself to be the sole exponent of indigenous nationalism. It has, in fact, made diligent efforts to promote itself as the legitimate successor of the Free Laotian Government that was established by Nationalist Laotians in Bangkok in 1946 and today presumes to speak on behalf of "the people of Laos".

The Viet Minh found it expedient to subordinate its Communist orientation beneath a nationalist facade until it had obtained a broad base of operations in Northwest Tonkin and a secure, contiguous border with a friendly neighbor - Communist China. In like manner, the yet insecure "Pathet Lao" movement has generally found it expedient to refrain thus far from the undisguised obeisance given the Soviet Union and Communist China by the Viet Minh and to pose as an "independent", "nationalist" advocate of indigenous Lactian aspirations.¹

Nevertheless, the history of the "Pathet Lao" movement, the pronouncements of its leaders, its propaganda, and its activities clearly indicate that the "Pathet Lao" movement and its leadership have long been simply a Lactian extension of the Viet Minh, in particular, and of International Communism, in general.

Historical Background - When in the fall of 1949 sincere Lactian nationalists disbanded the exiled Free Lactian Government in Bangkok and rallied to the support of their King and their country,² Prince Souphanouvong,

1. An unusual departure in this regard occurred shortly after the death of Stalin. See p. 9 below.
2. At least two of the members of the Free Lactian Government now hold important positions in the Royal Government of Laos. Prince Souvanna Phouma is currently Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs; Phya Kham Mao is currently Minister of Religious Worship.

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present leader of the "Pathet Lao" movement, turned instead to the Communist Viet Minh which was only too eager to secure indigenous elements in both Laos and Cambodia through which it could operate in an effort to gain control throughout Indochina. As a dissident member of the Royal Family of Laos, Souphanouvong was ideally suited for this purpose.

As early as 1949, Souphanouvong was given access to Viet Minh radio and press facilities through which to publicize his activities in opposition to the Royal Government. Viet Minh broadcasts during the period 1949-1951 freely bestowed upon Souphanouvong such titles as "President", "Premier", and "Chairman" of a series of evanescent rebel groups, none of which, however, attracted any widespread following from among the Lao-tian people.

In September 1950, the Viet Minh radio announced the establishment of a "Lao Resistance League"; and in November of that year made its first reference to a "National Assembly of Pathet Lao" which it asserted had met the preceding August. The Viet Minh radio further reported that the "National Assembly" had established a "National United Front" (also called the "Nea-Lao Issara Front"), and had elected an Executive Committee of the Front and a "Resistance Coalition Government". Souphanouvong was later referred to as "Prime Minister" of the "Government" and "Chairman" of the Front.

Viet Minh Control - At a conference, held in Viet Minh territory on March 11, 1951 Prince Souphanouvong's "Pathet Lao" movement, then known as the "Lao National United Front", was officially integrated into the major front coalition of the Viet Minh regime - the Lien Viet (National United) Front. The Lien Viet Front, according to the Viet Minh, operates "under the leadership of the Lao Dong (Workers') Party."¹ The "Pathet Lao" movement emerged from this conference as the Lao-tian branch of the "Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos Alliance bloc" which, until the conclusion of the Geneva Conference in July 1954, was widely publicized by Soviet, Chinese Communists, Viet Minh and "Pathet Lao" propagandists as evidence of the "solidarity" of the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao-tian peoples.

It is the claim of "Pathet Lao" leaders that their association with the "Alliance bloc" was free and voluntary and did not detract from their "independence". There are at the least two concrete statements of Communist origin that deny the validity of this claim.

1. Just two months before (February 11, 1951) the Communist Party of Indochina, which had been formed in 1930, was reconstituted as the Lao Dong (Workers') Party. The new name was publicly announced March 3, 1951.

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First, an American Communist journalist who visited Viet Minh and "Pathet Lao" areas in the fall of 1953 wrote: "The Bloc of Alliance with the National Liberation Fronts of Pathet Lao and Khmer (Cambodia)," was "Ho's answer" to the concept of the "Associated States of Indochina." (Emphasis added.)¹

Second, the full import of the integration of the "Pathet Lao" movement into the Lien Viet Front for the "independence" of that movement was revealed in an official Viet Minh circular dated November 1, 1951 entitled: "Remarks on the Official Appearance of the Vietnamese Workers' Party." According to this document which outlined reasons for the renaming of the Communist Party of Indochina and sought to justify to Party members the existence of three Communist Parties in Indochina:

Although Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which form the Indo-chinese peninsula, have a common enemy - French colonialism - their degree of evolution differs in all respects; economic, political, cultural, social. After the revolution of August 1945, the establishment of the people's democratic regime in Vietnam accentuated the difference between the degree of evolution of Vietnam and that of Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam then had a new democratic political, cultural, and economic organization, while Laos and Cambodia had an anti-imperialist government in the guerrilla zones.

That is why the character and principles of the Vietnamese Revolution differ from the revolutions of Laos and Cambodia, although all three have the same goal; ousting the imperialists and puppets. The mission of the revolution in Vietnam is to liberate the Nation, consolidate and develop the people's democratic regime towards socialism. But the revolutions of Laos and Cambodia aim at liberating the nation and establishing an anti-imperialist government in order to achieve popular democracy. Because of these distinct characteristics and principles, there must be separate parties.

The moment had arrived for the "Workers Party" to make its official appearance; if the name "Indochinese Party" had been retained, it would probably have prejudiced the support given by the Vietnamese revolution to the revolutions of Laos and Cambodia. The nationalist elements of Laos and Cambodia might

1. J. Storobin, Vietnam Fights for Freedom, London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1953, p. 56.

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have suspected Vietnam of wishing to control Cambodia and Laos. The band of imperialists and puppets would have been able to launch counter-propaganda destined to separate Vietnam from Cambodia and Laos, fomenting trouble among the Cambodian and Laotian peoples. Such an atmosphere of distrust could have harmed the unity of these nations in their fight against the French.

For these reasons, each country must have a separate revolutionary party made up of its working class.

a) In 1930, we recommended the creation of an Indochinese Communist Party, not only because Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos suffered under the same yoke of domination and had the same enemy, but also because at that time only the Revolutionary Movement in Vietnam was in a state of development, while it was still weak in Cambodia and Laos. If at that time there had not been one Communist Party for the three countries, the creation of a Communist and revolutionary movement in Cambodia and Laos would certainly have been retarded.

Today, however, the situation has changed. The Cambodian and Laotian peoples are rising to oppose the French and obtain their independence. Communist Party sections exist in Cambodia and Laos and are beginning to grow. Cambodia and Laos already have a united Liberation Front (Issarak in Cambodia; Issara in Laos). Cambodia has a National Liberation Committee; Laos a Resistance Government, ... Within these organizations there are already groups of faithful Communists who act as Delegations to the Indochinese Communist Party from which they receive directives. For that reason, the creation of a separate Communist Party for the working class of Vietnam does not risk weakening the leadership of the revolutionary movements in Cambodia and Laos or the carrying out of Marxist-Lenin propaganda action. In addition, the Vietnamese Party reserves the right to supervise the activities of its brother Parties in Cambodia and Laos.

b) Each Nation - Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, has its own Party, but unity of leadership and action remain between the three Parties. There are several means of unifying the leadership and action. For example, the Central Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party has designated a Cambodian and

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a Laotian bureau charged with assisting the revolutionary movements in these countries. It organizes periodic assemblies of the three parties in order to discuss questions of common interest; it works towards the creation of Vietnamese-Khmer-Laotian United Front.

c) Militarily Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos constitute a combat zone; Vietnam has substantially assisted Cambodia and Laos militarily as well as from all other points of view. The creation of a separate Vietnamese Party will not therefore weaken the military cooperation between the three nations in the fight they are waging against the imperialists. Later, however, if conditions permit, the three revolutionary Parties of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos will be able to unite to form a single Party; the Party of the Vietnam-Khmer-Laotian Federation.

Viet Minh and "Pathet Lao" Objectives - It is clear from the foregoing that the Viet Minh has long viewed Cambodia and Laos as part of a general "combat zone" throughout which it has sought to extend its control through the medium of indigenous sympathizers, if possible, or through direct military intervention, if necessary, without regard for recognized international boundaries.

The latter alternative of action was employed in April 1953 when the Viet Minh launched the first of several military incursions into Laos in the wake of which it sought to convert its "Pathet Lao" followers into an established "Government". In an effort to justify this overt act of international aggression, the Viet Minh chose to refer to its forces in Laos as "volunteers" as its Chinese Communist supporters had done earlier in Korea. Vehemently denouncing charges of aggression as "lying propaganda" and "slanderous assertions", the Viet Minh radio asked on May 4: "Who then are the real aggressors in Laos? It seems the Laotians alone have the right to make an accusation."

Actually, the legitimate voices of the Laotian people had already made the accusation three days after the invasion (April 15, 1953) when the Royal Government officially protested the Viet Minh invasion to the United Nations. Souphanouvong, however, taking his cue from the Viet Minh, issued a declaration via the Viet Minh radio on April 21, 1953 warmly thanking the Viet Minh for its intervention and announced himself as "President" of the "Laotian Resistance Government" which he described as "the only legal Government of Laos."

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It was quickly evident that the Viet Minh invasion on the one hand, and the calculated revival of an earlier reference to a "Resistance Government"¹ envisaged not only the establishment of Communist supremacy in Laos but had implications that reached beyond the borders of Laos. A Viet Minh broadcast of May 9, 1953 quoted the "Program and Statutes" adopted by the "National Congress of Pathet Lao" as calling for the "accession to power of the Laotian people" and for "unity with the peoples of Vietnam and Cambodia ... in order to liberate the whole of Indochina." (Emphasis added.) Souphanouvong himself demonstrated his agreement with broader Viet Minh objectives in this regard when he expressed similarly expansive sentiments and defined his concept of "peace" in an interview cited in the New York Daily Worker of April 19, 1954.² "Peace," said Souphanouvong, "means integral independence for the whole of Indochina. We will not tolerate the slightest attempts at division. (Emphasis added.)

Soviet and Chinese Communist Support - Propaganda-wise, the "Pathet Lao" movement has long enjoyed the unqualified support of both the Soviet Union and Communist China. Such support was particularly evident during the time of the Viet Minh invasion of Laos when both Soviet and Chinese Communist propagandists emphasized the existence of a Laotian "Resistance Government", made a concerted effort to subordinate the role of Viet Minh troops in Laos, and attempted to depict Laotian developments at the time as an indigenous nationalist uprising. Both Moscow and Peiping sought representation for the "Pathet Lao" at Geneva and while references to a "Resistance Government" in Laos have now been dropped out of deference to the Geneva Agreements, the "Pathet Lao" movement continues to receive backing from Moscow and Peiping in its efforts to retain control in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua.

Of direct consequence is the fact that the Viet Minh invasions of Laos would not have been possible without the equipment, supplies, technical guidance and assistance provided the Viet Minh by the Soviet Union via Communist China. It is of interest to note that Radio Peiping seemingly called for an invasion of Laos on January 17, 1953 when it stated:

A new situation has taken shape in the war in Vietnam... These victories have expanded and consolidated the liberated area in North Vietnam... To the south, the People's Army can join forces with the troops and guerrillas in Central Vietnam and

1. See p. 2 above.
2. Reported by the Communist correspondent for the London Daily Worker, Wilfred Burchett, who spent considerable time in Viet Minh-controlled areas.

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at the same time, increase the threat to the Red River Delta. To the West, it can reach the liberated region of Pathet Lao, making it untenable for the French aggressors in that State. (Emphasis added.)

Additional Statements and Activities Attesting the Communist Nature of the "Pathet Lao" Movement

The Geneva Conference - Despite a background of complete Communist control, "Pathet Lao" leaders, with the initial backing of Moscow, Peiping, and the Viet Minh, demanded representation of the "Pathet Lao" movement at the Geneva Conference as an independent entity and recognition by the Conference Powers of the "legitimacy and sovereignty" of the "Pathet Lao Government." Pamphlets in support of this contention were distributed by "Pathet Lao" agents in Geneva entitled "The People of Pathet Lao Struggle for Peace, Independence, Unity, and Democracy." These pamphlets which were attributed to the "Information Service of the Resistance Government of Pathet Lao", pictured Souphanouvong as "President", a new "national flag", and a special "national anthem." The fly leaf of these pamphlets carried the illuminating notation: "Reedited by the Information Agency of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

The claim of legitimacy was not accepted by the Geneva Conference Powers who acknowledged the sole sovereignty of the Royal Government of Laos. The "Pathet Lao" forces, emerged legally in only a slightly more favorable position than their "Khmer Resistance" counterparts in Cambodia who were directed to demobilize "on the spot". "Pathet Lao" forces were authorized to concentrate in two northern provinces of Laos (Phong Saly and Sam Neua) pending a political settlement to be effected through general elections scheduled to take place during 1955.

Claims of Sovereignty in Sam Neua and Phong Saly - Although "Pathet Lao" forces were given temporary authority at Geneva to retain de facto possession of regroupment areas in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua (minus the presence of Viet Minh forces) until the general elections of 1955, there was nothing in the Geneva Accords which recognized "Pathet Lao" sovereignty in these two provinces as distinct from the temporary right to continue its de facto control over its regroupment areas pending general elections. Nevertheless, "Pathet Lao" leaders continue to claim exclusive jurisdiction in these two provinces, to prevent the reestablishment of Royal Government Administration, and to characterize all attempts on the part of the Royal Government to reassert its authority in Phong Saly and Sam Neua as "attacks" and "violations." Stated a "Pathet Lao Command" spokesman on March 5, 1955:

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... all encroachments upon the territory of the two provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly are at utter variance with the Geneva Armistice Agreements in its letter and spirit. The Pathet Lao forces are determined to oppose these acts of violation and will not bear responsibility in case the Pathet Lao units are compelled to defend themselves. (Vietnam News Agency (DRV), March 6, 1955.)

Claims of Communist Victory at Geneva - The assertion that the cessation of hostilities in Laos was the result of Communist "peace" efforts has become a standard theme of "Pathet Lao" leaders. Typical of such comment was a Joint Order of the Day issued following the Geneva Conference over the signature of Kaysone, the "Pathet Lao Minister of Defense", and Ta Xuan Thu for the "High Command of the Vietnamese Volunteers", which stated:

[The Geneva Agreement] is a great victory of the people and liberation troops of Laos and of the Vietnamese Volunteer troops in their struggle for peace, independence, unification, and democracy. It is the result of the 8-year heroic struggle of regular, regional, people's guerrillas and Vietnamese Volunteer troops and of our people, under the farsighted leadership of the Pathet Lao Resistance Government and Premier Souphanouvong. (VNY, North Vietnam (DRV), July 25, 1954.)

Obstructions to a Negotiated Settlement - Although Royal Government- "Pathet Lao" negotiations to achieve a settlement on the question of the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua have been initiated several times since January 1955, "Pathet Lao" rigidity and obstructionist tactics have prevented any agreement on this question to date. Thao Sisouk, Laoian Chef du Cabinet (acting on behalf of Premier Katay) stated at a press conference on March 26, 1955, as follows regarding "Pathet Lao" behavior during negotiations:

We had the impression of having opposite us people who were perhaps Lao at heart but whose thinking was Communist. Besides, the Pathet Lao delegates, whom their propaganda wishes to pass off as Nationalists, never concealed that they were Stalinite Communists, displaying Stalinite books and pamphlets.

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Propaganda Activities - "Pathet Lao" propagandists, as inferred above, have freely distributed Communist propaganda publications and films of Soviet and Chinese Communist origin throughout the Laotian countryside, particularly in areas under their complete control. A Viet Minh broadcast on October 16, 1954 entitled "Sam Neua Town Reconstructed in Peace" stated:

During the festival days to welcome peace, people in neighboring villages came every night to see film shows. In the meantime, the visitors of the town read books or saw pictures and photos in the exhibition stand. (Vietnam News Agency (DRV), October 16, 1954.)

Persecution of Laotian Civilians - A resident of Sam Neua who was imprisoned by Viet Minh-"Pathet Lao" forces for a period of five months and released in the Fall of 1953 has reliably testified that following the Viet Minh invasion of Laos he was detained in a POW camp along with some 200 officials and other civilians of Sam Neua. He reported, in part:

During the day, the Viet Minh tied our arms with ropes .. (during the nights) they also tied our legs ... Most of the prisoners became sick due to undernourishment. Many of them developed swollen faces and limbs. Nearly every one of us was ill. Nevertheless, the Viet Minh forced us to work, for instance to fell trees in the forests and carry the wood for a long distance.

...The Viet Minh set up a court, which was called a people's court to try 15 of us ... the court consisted of a few ruthless Viet Minh and a few Laotian persons who were forced to serve by the Viet Minh.

Five of the accused were given death sentences, according to this ex-POW's report; three were sentenced to three to five years at hard labor, and the remainder were given suspended sentences of several years imprisonment. Regarding those given death sentences, the ex-POW asserted:

... The Viet Minh forced the father of the accused (Ba Bua?) to be on the side of the prosecution and he had to take part in passing the death sentence on his own son. ... tears ran down the eyes of (Ba Bua's?) father ... Viet Minh bent and kicked the accused who had been given death sentences. The people were shocked at the beastly atrocities of the Viet Minh. (Laotian Home Service, Vientiane, April 5, 1954.)

Tribute to Stalin - An unusual departure from the general practice of avoiding overt statements of allegiance to the Communist bloc occurred following the death of Stalin. In an official telegram transmitted on March 11, 1953 by the Viet Minh radio to Communist China for relay to the USSR,

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Choueng expressed his condolences and pledged "to reinforce our unity with the Soviet Government and people for the defense of peace against the imperialist aggressors."

Travel of Individuals to Communist Countries

1. The American Communist journalist, Joseph R. Storobin, has written one of the personalities he met in Peiping at the Asian and Pacific Conference in the fall of 1952 was Thao Nouhak Phomsavang who according to a Viet Minh broadcast of May 11, 1954 was "Minister of Finance and Agriculture" of the "Pathet Lao Resistance Government." (J. Storobin, ibid., p. 40.)

2. On November 25, 1952, a Chinese Communist transmitter announced that two "Pathet Lao" delegates had departed Peiping on November 23 enroute to China to attend the December 12 session of the World Congress for the Peace of World Peace.

3. On March 11, 1953 the Viet Minh radio announced that a two-man "Pathet Lao" delegation had arrived in Peiping March 8 enroute to the International Conference for the Defense of Rights of Youth which met in Vienna March 22, 1953.

4. On July 9, 1953 a Chinese Communist transmitter announced that two "Pathet Lao" delegates were in Peiping enroute to the following three Comintern congresses:

- 1) Third World Youth Congress in Bucharest, July 3-5, 1953
- 2) Fourth Peace Festival of World Youth and Students, Bucharest, August 2, 1953
- 3) Third Congress of World Students and Pupils, Warsaw, August 27, 1953.

The Viet Minh radio announced on April 4, 1955 that Col. Singkapo, chairman of the Neo-Lao-Itsala Front" had been appointed "Pathet Lao" representative to the Asian Conference for the Relaxation of International Tensions held in Delhi April 6-10, 1955. According to Lao Press Bulletin of the Lao Government, issued March 28, 1955, Singkapo applied to British authorities to issue a visa on his Viet Minh passport for stopovers in Hong Kong and Singapore enroute to Delhi. When asked for proof of his Viet Minh citizenship, Singkapo replied that he was a Lao citizen but that it was perfectly all right for a member of the "Pathet Lao" to use a Viet Minh passport.

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